SARON MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Saron Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)
510 Main Street
St. Joseph, Michigan 49085

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Email: info@saronlutheran.org
Phone: 269-983-1273
Facebook:www.facebook.com/saronlutheranchurchst.joseph

The Rev. Joan Oleson, Pastor
Home: 269-983-2475
Email: oleson@saronlutheran.org

Marcus Roll, Music Director
Email: roll1mc@gmail.com

Irma Gorman, Organist

Amanda Bradley, Admin Assistant
Cell: 419-306-5780
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
bradley717@gmail.com

Megan Savage, Bookkeeper
Email: financial@saronlutheran.org

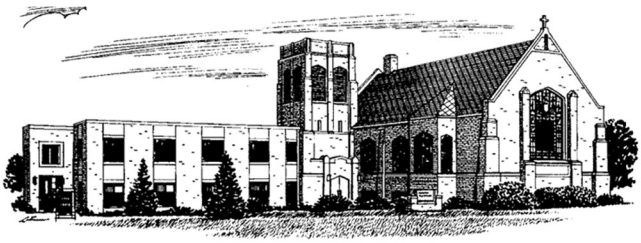
Sara Porter, Childcare Specialist
Email: portersara20@gmail.com

Typical Sunday at Saron:
Fall, Winter and Spring:
8:30am Worship On-Location
9:40 Learning Hour for Ages 2-Adult
11am Worship with Zoom Option
Nursery Available

Summer of 2023 (beginning June 4):
10am Worship
On-Location and via Zoom
Nursery Available
No Learning Hour

We hold in prayer:
The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton,
Presiding Bishop, ELCA
The Rev. Dr. Craig Satterlee, Bishop of the
North/West Lower Michigan Synod, ELCA
The Episcopal Diocese of Western MI

Our Companion Synods:
Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras
Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
Lutheran Church of Latvia
Saron's Mission: *Joyfully sharing God's love for all!!*



PASTOR JOAN'S ARTICLE FOR FEBRUARY 2023

"…the kingdom of heaven has come near," Jesus proclaims (Matthew 4:17). And I wonder, "Where do you see that kingdom near? Where do you see (or experience) God at work?" Those are some of the questions we ask this season of Epiphany (which means revealed, or realized.) As I look to answer, these are a few of the things I see.

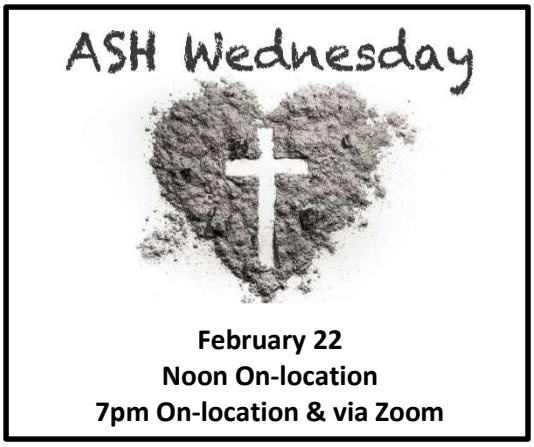
The ordination of Pastor Sally Azar, the first female Palestinian pastor ordained in the Holy Land. Here is the URL to a short (6 minute) documentary about the journey. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4ppA7BYnws.
I invite you to google her name. You will find many, many articles, and a video of the service. As stated in the news of the Lutheran World Federation, *The invitation to this historic event, issued by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), reads: "Sally's ministry sends a powerful message of acceptance and progress in the church's journey toward Gender Justice."*
https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/first-palestinian-woman-be-ordained-pastor

Closer to home, are the sensory bags and noise canceling headphones that Saron now has for use during worship and other activities. (See related article and picture.) These resources further our ministry of inclusion and welcome. Thanks to Kathy Bergh for helping to make this happen.

And I celebrate the ability to "sit with" colleagues on Zoom and discuss deeply the *"Language for God"* and why it matters.

Yes, God is at work. I name just a few of the things I've experienced recently. There are many more. And, I wonder, "Where, in your life, do you realize that God is working?"

-Pastor Joan



February 22
Noon On-location
7pm On-location & via Zoom

General Information

COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS

Watch weekly emails and door signage for any change in protocol. As of printing, masks are encouraged for those who feel so inclined but not required. Nursery workers and communion assistants will wear masks.

OFFICE HOURS

Pastor Joan
Monday-Thursday Mornings
Amanda Bradley (Admin Assistant):
Mondays & Thursdays 8am-noon
Wednesdays as needed
Helping Hands Office Volunteers:
Wednesdays 9:00am-11am (approx)
Megan Savage (Bookkeeper):
Tuesdays & Thursdays 5:30pm

When Pastor is out of town, emergency pastoral care information can be obtained by calling the church office (269/983-1273) or contacting the council president.

Note: Emails for Pastor should be addressed to oleson@saronlutheran.org to ensure privacy. Emails to Amanda and the church office should be sent to info@saronlutheran.org.

Caring and Sharing

IN OUR PRAYERS

Kathleen & Phillip Preston are at Caretel in St. Joseph;
Tom Taylor is at Caretel in St. Joseph;
John Olson is at the Willows in St. Joseph.

Happy Birthday Wishes to Saron's Members!

2/2 Lindsay Gaspari
2/2 Kate Kohs
2/3 Fran Bolson
2/3 Makayla Bradley
2/5 Helen Peters-Totzke
2/5 Erin Vollmer
2/6 Mary Alice Brunner
2/6 Linda Dipert
2/8 Ernie Knauf
2/9 Frieda Williams
2/10 Aiden Ashley
2/10 Sterling Johnson
2/11 Kyle Carter
2/15 Robert King
2/15 Hazel Kohs
2/21 Edmund Staude
2/21 Ryan Talbert
2/22 Patrick Blanchard
2/22 Darlene Kiessel
2/22 Hailey Talbert
2/26 Wendy King
2/27 Ted Hovick
2/28 Cheryl Houser

Happy Anniversary Wishes to Saron's Members!

We have no official anniversaries in our files for February so no matter who you hold as your Valentine, we wish you a month full of love and kindness.

"God's Blessings for a very happy day and year round!"

If there are any omissions from the birthday or anniversary list, or if a date is incorrect, please let us know so we can get it correct in the future!

CONGRATULATIONS

Maisie James Skudlarczyk was welcomed into God's family through the act of Holy Baptism on December 30, 2022. Maisie is the daughter of Jon & Gretchen and granddaughter of Pastor Joan & Jim Oleson.

FORTIFY & fly

I'm sure you would not be shocked to learn we're still waiting for estimates from contractors related to our ideas for a ramp into the chancel area and new flooring in the sanctuary. That's just the way things tend to work these days. When we know more, we'll pass it on to you!

At the end of December 2022, we had collected an additional $170 for a total of $377,606 towards our pledge total of $367,205, which is 103%! As always, thank you for being with us on this journey!

Worship

PRAYER GROUP

You hear the invitation to offer your prayer petitions (concerns or thanksgivings) via our attendance cards each Sunday morning at worship. These are then given to the Monday prayer group for their offering. Requests can also be made confidentially online via a link in our Thursday mailings. Details of the requests can range from none to some particulars, for example, healing or upcoming surgery, travel, or celebrating a birth. **You are also invited to come be part of the Monday group at 11am.** Please know that this is not about professional or "right" praying. You don't even have to pray aloud, if you would prefer to pray quietly. We follow a simple format of morning prayer and insert the requested petitions and prayers for Saron's ministry and the world in which we live. Most weeks we are done in 30 minutes. If you want to know more about this ministry, please contact Pastor Joan.

ALTAR FLOWERS

Sponsor a week by using the link in the weekly email or by calling the church office. Make sure to note any special occasion to be recognized in the bulletin. Flowers are $35 per vase. Checks can be payable to Saron with "Flowers" as the memo. Please take them home after the 2nd service to enjoy. **Simply return the vase to Saron.**

Are you interested in becoming a member of Saron or learning more about the faith from the Lutheran perspective? If so, contact Pastor Joan.

FACEBOOK

We often share pictures of Saron's ministry on our Facebook page and we get great feedback. It is our practice not to put names with the pictures. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Pastor.

Nursery service is available during worship. In order to utilize the space most effectively, this option is primarily directed towards our youngest members and guests. For preschoolers that occasionally need more physical and/or emotional space, activities are available in the narthex. There are also clipboards with coloring pages, as well as children's bulletins, to assist kids as they transition into participating in worship. **It's vital to embrace family units in all stages in our congregation and as such, we gladly welcome wiggles and giggles in worship!**

The goal of the nursery is to provide a safe environment to facilitate a meaningful worship experience for families. We recognize that may not look the same for all and encourage sharing concerns and suggestions.

ZOOM COFFEE HOUR

We will continue the Zoom fellowship at 11am as long as there is interest. The link remains the same each week.

SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to read and reflect on the Scriptures for the day.

February 5: Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Isaiah 58:1-9
Psalm 112:1-9
1 Corinthians 2:1-16
Matthew 5:13-20

February 12: Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Psalm 119:1-8
1 Corinthians 3:1-9
Matthew 5:21-37

February 19: Transfiguration of Our Lord
Exodus 24:12-18
Psalm 2
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9

February 26: First Sunday in Lent
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7
Psalm 32
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11

YOUTH GROUP

Our middle school and high school youth group members met after church on Jan 22 to put away some pizza and play games. It's rumored Alaina was the boss when it came to MarioKart. That statement may have been laced with sarcasm. Confirmation was not received when we reached out for further comment. There were eye rolls.

Our next meeting will be after 2nd service on
February 19, 2023
Annual Bradley Taco Bar & Pool Party
4370 S. Tanglewood Trl in St. Joseph

Watch your email for more information. Bring your bathing suits! Friends welcome!

Contact Merrily at merrilyannsmith@gmail.com with any questions.

Learning

Saron is a congregation seeking to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered and sent by the Word.

SUNDAY LEARNING HOUR

We offer a time of age-appropriate study between the two services (9:40am-10:30am):

- **Grades 5 and Under** meet in the Sunday school classroom.
- **Confirmation Students** (Grades 6-8) meet in the confirmation classroom.
- **Adult Forum** meets in the upstairs lounge.

THURSDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

Our studies continue up until February 16, when we will break for the Lenten season. You are welcome to join us on **Thursday mornings in the lounge from 9:30am-11am.** Contact Pastor Joan if you have any questions. This class is open to all interested in attending, for one session or many.

TUESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

In the time leading up to Lent, we will continue to use videos produced by Franciscan Friar Casey Cole as a springboard to our weekly discussions, typically dealing with a religious topic or a current social issue. While presented from a Catholic perspective, the videos allow us to examine differences between Lutherans and Catholics, usually with the conclusion that we're more alike than different, and to emphasize that we all live in the same world, face the same problems, and seek help and comfort from the same God.

Note that we will not meet on Tuesday, February 14, since most of our regulars have plans for Valentine's Day.

We meet Tuesday evenings at 6 pm in the upstairs lounge for an hour then adjourn to a local restaurant for food and fellowship. All are welcome!

If you have any questions, feel free to call, text, or email:
Bob Kynast (269-921-2786, bobkynast@gmail.com)
Don Hafer (269-985-3637, hafer.don@gmail.com)

FORUM & fellowship

"No Humans Need Apply!"
Artificial Intelligence and Human Well-being

Join us for the last two sessions of Forum & Fellowship before the Lenten break. Technology, artificial intelligence; is it a gift from God? Is it the ultimate perversion of our individual self-interest? Will it enhance human well-being? Does it signal the end of humanity as we know it? How many times a day do you rely on some form of artificial intelligence without giving it another though? It has become ubiquitous in our lives. At the same time that we rely on it, many also fear it. What is exactly out there? How far has it gone? How do our faith values inform our participation in this evolving technological world?

Claudia Staude will be facilitating this discussion based on a unit she developed for her senior English Symposium class. The idea to include it in Forum & Fellowship was precipitated by a recent piece in The Atlantic, "The End of High-School English". Whether you are young, middle-aged, or "of a certain age", this topic will be relevant to you.

Forum & Fellowship meets Wednesday, February 1 & Wednesday, February 15.
7pm at Saron
Bring a friend. All are welcome!

All are welcome to join us on **February 5th at 6:30pm** in the upstairs lounge, to discuss "Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World and Why Things Are Better Than You Think" by Hans Rosling. We will have fun with this one, from the author, through the ideas being presented, a lot is begging discussion. It is suggested that beforehand you read the introduction and answer the questions posed to give you even more ideas to ponder and share. Ed Staude will be our discussion leader.

Then on March 5th, we will discuss "The Book of Longings" by Sue Monk Kidd. The author takes an audacious, fictional approach to history grounded in meticulous research and written with reverential approach to Jesus' life and possible "marriage". More on this in the next newsletter.

Sound interesting? Come be a part of our robust discussions. Questions, or if you want to be included on the email list to be notified of meetings and/or Zoom links, please contact Kathy Cowall (269)428-0354 or kcowall@hotmail.com.

"Every book you've ever read is just a different combination of 26 letters". -Reign of Reads

LIVING LUTHERAN MAGIZINE

It's time to renew your "Living Lutheran" subscription! The cost is $9. Please send cash with a note or a check with an appropriate memo. There is no official form - your payment is considered a subscription.

The Living Lutheran is the magazine of the ELCA and has lots of feature stories about ministry around the country, as well as ELCA news. Subscribing through Saron provides a significant cost reduction over individual subscriptions while still allowing it to be delivered directly to your home.

Women of the ELCA

DEBORAH CIRCLE

Deborah Circle will meet at 7pm on Wednesday, February 8, 2023 in the church lounge. Denise will provide Zoom. That link will be emailed close to the meeting date.

The study lesson will be from the 2023 January/February issue of Gather: Session One: The Ten Commandments: reviving the soul, p. 22-29. At this writing, a study leader is needed. Contact Melanie at 269/449-8399 if you would like to volunteer or have any questions.

DORCAS CIRLCE

After a 3-year COVID-related delay, we are excited to announce the Dorcas Circle's 5th Annual Hymn Sing! **Sunday, February 19 at 3:45pm**. This event will be one hour. We will sing the top 13 hymns from the previous 4 years and recognize a few for their perfect, or almost perfect, attendance. This is weather permitting, of course! All are welcome, both singers and listeners. Hope to see you there!

Hospitality

SUNDAY SNACKS

Who doesn't love a snack during a time of fellowship in the narthex? If you would like to be a Sunday snack host, sign up via the link in our weekly email or call/email the office so Amanda can sign you up. Please plan for 30 to partake. Thank you!

Outreach

NOISY OFFERING

We receive a noisy offering (or those not-so-noisy bills) on the first Sunday of each month. These gifts are sent to ELCA World Hunger.

Thank you for your generous offerings!

ELCA Good Gifts: Th-a-a-a-nks!

This is what a herd of seven goats looks like. We bought twenty-five! Imagine the joy when they are delivered!

Once again, Saron stepped up when asked. During the 2022 Advent season, we sponsored 25 goats, 10 piglets, 17 honeybee colonies, and 32 broods of chicks for the ELCA Good Gifts program. These gifts, totaling a record $2,210, will be sent around the world where they will do the most good.

Thanks to everyone who contributed. We are making a difference!

"The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

BENTON HARBOR SOUP KITCHEN

For I was hungry and you gave me food.
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.
I was a stranger and you welcomed me.
Matthew 25:35

On December 22, Saron members Jim Manore & Jim Caple, under the leadership of Deb Standen (thanks for filling in at the last minute!) were busy at the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen preparing lunches for 60 guests before the blizzard hit. Guests were served a ham dinner which included cookies prepared by Saron members. **If you are able to help with the preparation and serving, or by providing cookies, please use the link in the weekly email or contact Kathie Bradley at 269-921-4665.**

Thank you to all who continue to support this ministry with your time, contributions, and prayers.
Joyfully sharing God's love for all!

INCLUSIVITY TASK FORCE

The Inclusivity Task Force is committed to extending a welcome to all. Our congregation adopted the following welcome statement and is a **Reconciling in Christ** church.

As a community of faith who *joyfully shares God's love for all*, we believe our lives and faith are strengthened by diversity. We strive to be a community who welcomes people of every ability, age, citizenship status, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, marital status, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. We are committed to the work of racial equity. Whatever life's circumstance, we openly welcome and value you. We celebrate God's unconditional love and respond joyfully to your presence here. All are welcome. You are welcome.

If you ever have any questions or need clarification on our inclusivity journey, please feel free to call any one of the task force members:

Connor Ashley: cashley1837@outlook.com
Laurel Gacek: 269/470-6062 or mlmg2445@sbcglobal.net
Laura Hicks: 517/930-0579 or lhicks42@gmail.com
Darlene Kiessel: 269/313-4062 or kiessel@me.com
Diane Madej (Open Hearts. Open Church): 231/670-0328 or dianemadej234@gmail.com
Pr Joan Oleson: 269/983-1273 or oleson@saronlutheran.org

Interfaith Action

Interfaith Action (swmichiganinterfaith.org) is a coalition of over 40 faith communities in Allegan, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Van Buren Counties. Some members of Saron attend meetings and work with various task force groups. One of the goals of Interfaith Action is to promote understanding and respect for diversity.

Support

The Support Committee will meet on February 21 at 8pm instead of the typical second Tuesday (one-month change only). Contact Don Hafer with any questions at 269/985-3637.

STOCK DONATIONS

Saron partners with TD Ameritrade, a brokerage firm, to accept stock donations. If you would like to donate stock, email Joe Ulrey at josephulrey@yahoo.com to receive more information. Thanks!

Facilities

HELPING HANDS (Previously Golden Hammers)

We do all sorts of things from building maintenance to preps for worship in the sanctuary to assembling bulletins and newsletters and so much more. We meet on Wednesdays around 9am and know you are invited – whatever your age, gender, or ability. There is a job for you to use your helping hands.

Directory Updates

We are doing our best to keep our printed directories up to date and available for your use. If you picked up one of the early copies, you may need to make these edits:

- Marcus Roll's area code is 517
- Jan Taylor's house number is 1153

If you see an error or omission, please let us know!

Gratitude

Thank you! Your many greetings and acts of kindness to Jim and me over the Christmas season were greatly appreciated. We are grateful to be part of such a warm and loving community.

-Pastor Joan

Did you know that contributions collected at our Advent Soup Suppers were used to buy gift certificates to send to our college students, along with a note of encouragement and good wishes for their studies? We recently sent these notes to eight very grateful students!

Upcoming Events

Mid-Week Wednesdays
March 1, 8, 15, 22, & 29
6pm Soup Supper
7pm Worship with Zoom Option

Sing with All the Saints in Glory

Lent is a time of renewal. We focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus - and in turn focus on our own death and resurrection found in baptism. We who have been baptized into Christ have died to sin and are righteous saints of God. At the same time, we know that we struggle daily with sin as we seek to follow Jesus. This is the wonderful Lutheran understanding of sinner and saint.

We have a rich calendar of saints in the Lutheran tradition—Christians from every age who have pointed to Christ in their living and dying. In remembering these Christians who have gone before, we find inspiration for our Christian journey. This year's Lenten midweek series honors the commemorations that occur during the weeks in Lent in 2023. Commemorating these individuals is a starting point for a deeper engagement with our Christian faith.

(From Sundays & Seasons)

Baptism of Our Lord

FEBRUARY 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 9am Helping Hands 11am Zoom Coffee 7pm Forum & Fellowship	**2** 9:30am Bible Study 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**3**	**4** 9am Council Retreat
5 8:30am Worship 9:40am Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option **Installation of Council**	**6** 11am Prayer Group	**7** 6pm Bible Study	**8** 9am Helping Hands NO Zoom Coffee 7pm Deborah Circle Pastor Vacation →	**9** 9:30am Bible Study 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**10**	**11** →
12 8:30am Worship 9:40am Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option →	**13** 11am Prayer Group	**14** NO Bible Study	**15** 9am Helping Hands 11am Zoom Coffee 7pm Forum & Fellowship	**16** 9:30am Bible Study 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal **NEWSLETTER ARTICLES DUE**	**17**	**18**
19 8:30am Worship 9:40am Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**20** 11am Prayer Group	**21** 6pm Bible Study 8pm Support Meeting	**22** 9am Helping Hands 11am Zoom Coffee **Ash Wednesday** **Noon** **7pm with Zoom Option**	**23** NO Bible Study 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**24**	**25** 11am Ron Bolson Memorial Service
26 8:30am Worship 9:40am Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**27** 11am Prayer Group	**28** NO Bible Study				

SARON LUTHERAN CHURCH
510 MAIN STREET
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A Congregation of:
The North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

FEBRUARY 2023 NEWSLETTER

Radical Act of Hospitality: Sensory Bags

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend our synod's Disability Learning Day, as well as study the book of Acts on Thursday mornings here at Saron. Both have been blessings to me, but I also believe that when God wants to teach us something, He shows us in several different ways in close proximity. He has laid a few things on my heart through these two experiences.

In Acts, we learned that the one of defining characteristics of the early church was hospitality, along with the fostering of community. It is apparent to me that Saron is a congregation that also seeks that characteristic. God uses us, his people who he made in unique ways, to reach out to all he loves.

At the disability workshop, we were reminded of the words from 1 Corinthians 12:18, "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be." One of the main focuses was that everyone seeks a true sense of belonging. In order for that to happen ALL people need to feel deeply welcomed, without condition, as a part of God's family. We were challenged to reach out with a radical act of hospitality. One of the suggestions was to offer sensory bags for those who may be neurodivergent. This could be anyone on the Autism spectrum, someone with attention or sensory issues, or even our little ones learning to sit in church. I am excited that Saron has been gifted with several sensory bags from Autism Support of Michigan (formerly known as Autism Society of Michigan.) These bags contain a variety of fidgets that can help someone feel more able to sit quietly and/or focus easier. We also received noise canceling headphones, for those who are sound sensitive.

May we, at Saron, be known for our hospitality and extravagant welcome, as well as the fostering of everyone in our community, without condition.

- Kathy Bergh